

Meeting Notes
Regional Concerns Meeting
East Montpelier Bridge 68 Project
June 2, 2014
U-32 Middle and High School Cafeteria
7:30 -10 p.m.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) held a regional concerns meeting on the East Montpelier Bridge 68 Project at the U-32 Middle and High School Cafeteria on June 2, 2014. The bridge, located at the junction of VT 14 and US 2, is in deteriorated condition and will be replaced by VTrans in 2017. To better facilitate traffic movements, a new turning lane will be added to the existing 2-lane bridge, turning lanes will also be constructed on US 2 and a traffic signal will be installed.

The meeting agenda included a project overview, an analysis of construction traffic management options, an illustration of potential accelerated construction methods, a summary of the traffic management plan, an outline of next steps and public discussion and questions about the project.

An approximate 45-minute presentation was given by Stantec consultants, Tom Knight and Greg Goyette, who have been hired to assist VTrans design the project. They explained that concerns about the impact of a two-year construction project on travelers would be significant and caused them to take another look at how the project could be accelerated. Currently there are 8,700 – 10,800 vehicles on US 2 and 4,400 vehicles on VT 14 daily. The consultants evaluated four options for managing traffic and reached the following conclusions:

- Maintain 2 Lanes on US Route 2 – Not feasible during construction because portions of the road are too narrow
- Utilize Single Lane Alternating Traffic – Delays during peak hours would be severe
- Off Peak / Night Construction – Traffic impact would be minimal but removing concrete is noisy and night-time construction is costly
- Temporary Bridge vs. Closure on VT 14 - Peak and off peak delays are manageable with the bridge closed and a short work zone. Bridge closure diverted to VT 302 would add four miles to travel.

An accelerated bridge method currently under consideration would eliminate temporary bridge and allow bridge construction to be completed utilizing a 75 day bridge closure target. Major substructure elements that can be installed prior to closing the existing bridge and prefabricated elements would be incorporated into the design. VTrans would set limits on contract duration and give the contractor incentives to finish early.

Following the presentation, members of the public provided feedback to the project design team and asked questions. *[See summary of public dialogue below; questions/comments by the public are in italics.]* Approximately 60 people attended the meeting and the public discussion period lasted over one

hour. Most of the responses to questions were made by Wayne Symonds, VTrans' Structures Design Manager.

Impacts to business

What about impacts to businesses?

On other projects we've been successful in using "Business Is Open" signs to direct people to businesses and getting grants from other state agencies to assist businesses

North Star Fireworks cited these concerns:

- *A detour will add 12 miles to the employees' commute to and from work (24 miles round trip)*
- *The detour will add mileage to our delivery trucks*
- *Added mileage may limit the pool of employees*
- *A closure of 75 days disrupt 80% of our yearly business*

Wayne Symonds asked what window of time is represented by the 80%. The response was Memorial Day through Labor Day.

You should make a map of business owners that will be affected by the bridge closure. It's not only the local businesses but also logging and granite trucks.

What about the local economy? I would feel better if someone studied the small businesses that stand to lose as a result of the bridge closure. We need to understand the impact. I think VTrans should be looking out for the people rather than just saving money.

We own a car dealership and our sales are mostly during the summer months. May through August is best for us. Also, within 1 ½ miles there are about a dozen other businesses. It would be a hardship to our business if a temporary bridge is not built.

I have a lawn mowing business and am concerned about the elevation on Route 14 north of the bridge. Is it possible to move the stop bar for cars back from the intersection of Route 2?

I sell boats and motorcycles and our busy season is in the summer.

Businesses on Route 14 will get hit hard. As a gesture of good will, businesses should be compensated.

I watched the reconstruction of the "singing bridge" in North Montpelier. There was a small store nearby that was done in by the construction and is now closed. I worry about the Dudley Store in East Montpelier. It may be economically vulnerable.

Traffic

VTrans should start a dialogue with towns and the towns should get extra money to take care of impacts of bridge construction:

- *Extra traffic will find its way onto local routes that aren't built to carry it – e.g. Country Club Road. Roads that are not designed for heavy traffic will suffer wear and tear.*
- *Signage to direct people to proper detours routes won't keep people off more local routes*

The detour map shown in the presentation is not complete because it does not show the unofficial detours that people will take.

Construction on the Danville Project was ridiculous. The Tourist Office told people not to go on Route 2. We don't want that to happen here.

What do you consider the peak traffic hours?
Peak hours are between 7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m.

Where did you get your traffic numbers? They seem low.
Traffic counts were done by VTrans in the summer of 2013.

Traffic will be impacted regionally, not just in East Montpelier.

What will the speed limit be during construction?
The speed limit will be 25 mph. If there is a problem with speeding we can contact the state police to patrol.

Traffic lights cause people to speed. We've seen this happen with the new light in East Montpelier.

The unofficial detour routes are a problem. They will need to be clearly marked. Please review the unofficial detours and assist the towns.

How long will the delay be during construction?
VTrans' performance standards define a moderate delay as 10 minutes or less but sometimes work within construction zones are unpredictable.

Is there any place for a pedestrian bridge if the bridge is closed?
That is not something that we have looked at but would be interested in knowing about the pedestrian use during the summer. In this project it likely not practical because of dangers of routing pedestrians through a busy construction zone. In other projects we have considered leasing a bus to shuttle pedestrians but have not yet found it necessary.

Construction

What has been the Accelerated Bridge Program's record of on-time delivery?
We've had 25 projects in the last three years and we have always beat or come in on time delivering projects. For example, we predicted a 45 day closure in Middlebury and the bridge was open in 42 days. We believe 75 days is a conservative estimate for this project.

When counting days a bridge may be out, are you using business days or calendar days?
Calendar days

What are the allowable noise levels for night time construction?
We follow OSHA rules and it usually is 75 decibels. We ask contractors to tidy up their sites so that materials are in place for night time work and avoid noisy activities such as drilling during evening hours. We've found the most problematic sound is the back-up horns but OSHA rules do not allow the horns to be silenced for safety reasons.

How late is the construction season?

We like to be done with paving and concrete by October 15. Also, daylight work hours are shorter during the fall.

I am concerned about the noise at night, light pollution and the back and forth of heavy vehicles on our roads. Seth Gardner hauls through Route 14.

Why can't the Route 2 road work start now?

The bridge construction will cause a lot of disruption to Route 2 so there is not an advantage to begin reconstruction work on Route 2 ahead of the bridge work.

Emergency response

Have you talked with Emergency Services about access during construction?

No, not yet. Typically we follow up after a meeting like we are having tonight. In our experience, we do not know if there are unique challenges until we sit down and have a meeting with local emergency responders.

I am an EMT and I am not sure how response will work with the bridge out.

Design

Moving the stop bar on Route 14 closer to the bridge will result in crashes because traffic coming down the steep hill need distance to stop, especially in winter.

We would like to see attractive railings on the bridge.

Communications

I found out about this meeting from our local administrator. Widespread communication about this meeting did not happen.

Seven months ago I was told that people would be out to talk to me about Right of Way but nobody has. These talks have been delayed because of a discrepancy we discovered in our ROW records.

My observations of this meeting are:

- *The tone of the presentation is about VTrans saving money and the agency wants to sell people on this idea.*
- *The communications about this meeting are troubling.*
- *The economic impact of bridge closure to the local economy needs to be explored*
- *Is a decision about this still on the table?*

East Montpelier has suffered through five projects. I'd like you to do a better job of informing the public. There is NO good choice.

Decision about project

When will a decision about construction be made?

We do not have a hard date. We plan to construct in the summer of 2017 so we will need to decide by the end of the summer so we can begin work on Right of Way.

Who will make the decision?

A decision will be made at a high level within VTrans. We will look at all the options.

I spoke with the Deputy Secretary and was told that no decision was made and that what the town wants will weigh in heavily.

Other

I hold my breath going across the bridge. How often is it inspected?

Inspections are done on a two-year cycle. But this bridge is done every 12 months. We will do it even more often if it's needed. Once a bridge needs inspection once a year it is a sign that it needs major work.

There are large white pines in the area that you have designated for the temporary bridge. These trees add to the character of the area as they are a vertical green space that is enjoyable.

You have not talked about archeological resources. Was a study done of the Mill site that was formerly in the area that you have identified for a construction zone?

We are aware of the existence of a Mill site but do not think it would be affected. It is something that we would confirm with experts.

At the close of the meeting VTrans officials thanked the public for their input and said the agency would continue to evaluate construction options for the bridge during the summer months and would hold another public meeting in late summer or early fall to review design options.